

Hebrew

The Alphabet

Letter	Phonetic Value	Classical Hebrew	Modern Hebrew
א	?	’ (?)	?
ב	v	v	v
ג	γ	ǵ	g
ד	ð	ǵ	d
ה	h	h	h
ו	w	w	v
ז	z	z	z
ח	h	ḥ	x (ch, kh)
ט	tʃ	t	t
י	j	y	y
כ (final ד)	x	x	x (ch, kh)
ל	l	l	l
מ (final ט)	m	m	m
נ (final ו)	n	n	n
ס	s	s	s
ע	ç	’ (ç)	?
פ (final י)	f	f	f (ph)
צ (final י)	sç	š	ts (tz)
ק	q	q	k
ר	r	r	r
ש	ʃ	š	š (sh)
ׂש	tʃ	ś	s
ׂת	θ	t	t (th)

Begadkefat Letters

Historically, Classical Hebrew distinguished the plosives, i.e., b, g, d, k, p, t, from their spirant counterpart, i.e., v, ǵ, ǵ, x, f, ǵ, through the sign *dāǵēš*. In Modern Hebrew, only three of these consonants are preserved with their spirant counterpart, i.e., b, k, p, v, x, f. The spirant counterparts of g, d, and t have been lost, and are realized as plosives.

Plosives		Spirants	
ב	b	ב	v
ג	g	ג	ǵ
ד	d	ד	ǵ
ק	k	ק	x
פ	p	פ	f
ט	t	ט	ǵ

The Vowels and Diphthongs

Hebrew vowels may be divided into three main categories, the reduced, the short, and the long vowels.

Diphthongs		Reduced		Short		Long	
אַ	aw	אַָּ	āy	ַָּ	ă	ַָּ	ā
ַָּ	ay	ַָּ	ōy	ַָּ	ě	ַָּ	ē
ַָּ	ey	ַָּ	ūy	ַָּ	ō	ַָּ	ō
		ַָּ	ē	ַָּ	ə	ַָּ	ū
				ַָּ	u	ַָּ	ī
				ַָּ	i	ַָּ	ī

While each of these vowels were once pronounced with distinction, they are reduced to five short vowels, e.g., a, e, i, o, u. Regardless of their current phonetic value, the accents are used to distinguish the vowels from the reduced, short and long.

The Transliteration of the Semivowels

In Hebrew there are three letters that function as vowels נ 'ālef, י yōd, and ו wāw. The letters have the following function:

א 'Ālef

'Ālef is used in the following:

a) All initial vowels in Hebrew begin with 'ālef., i.e.,

'āhav	אַהֲבָה	'ehī	אַהֲרֹן	'onī	אַנְיָה	'ukkāf	אַקְפָּה
'abbā	אַבָּא	'eres	אַרְצָה	'oxel	אַכְלָה	'ūvāl	אַוְבָּל
'āvīv	אַבִּיבָּה	'ēm	אַמָּה	'ōr	אַרְוָה	'ivūl	אַבּוֹלָה

b) 'Ālef by default denotes the glottal-stop, and can occur in the beginning, middle, and end of word., i.e.,

'abbā	אַבָּא
Yō'ēl	יְוָאֵל
qərī'āh	קְרִיאָה
ro'š	רְאֵשׁ
ne'āh	נְאָה
nābbī'	נְבִיאָה

ו Yōd

Yōd is used to represent:

a) Yōd represent the consonant y., i.e.,

yā'ēš	יְאֵשׁ
ḥayyīm	חֵיִם
'ūlāy	אַוְלָה

b) Yōd preceded by *hīreq*, i.e., - , denotes the long vowel ī, i.e.,

'īsī	אִיסִי
'īr	עִירָה
pīl	פִּילָה
pī	פִּיָּה

1 Wāw

Wāw is used to represent:

a) Wāw represent the consonant *w*., i.e.,

widda'	וִידָע
liwwūy	לִוְויִי
qahwāh	קַהְוָה
šaw	שָׁוֹ

b) Wāw preceded by *hōlem*, i.e., ֲ, denotes the long vowel *ō*, and when preceded *šureq*, i.e., ִ, denotes the long vowel *ū*., i.e.,

'ōy	אָוִי
yōm	יּוֹם
'ēzō	אֵיזּוֹ
'ūl	אָוָל
šūr	שּׁוֹר
hū	הּוֹא

The Consonants

These letters *ו*, *נ*, *ק*, *ש*, *ת*, *ט*, *ר*, which were once distinguished in classical Hebrew have become indistinguishable from *א*, *כ*, *כ*, *ו*, *ת*, *ב*, thus sharing a common phonology in Modern Hebrew., i.e.,

?	נ	x	כ	s	ס
ו	ע		ח		ש
v	ב	k	כ	t	ת
ו			ח		ט

NOTE: While these letters *ו*, *נ*, *ק*, *ש*, *ת*, *ט*, *ר*, are commonly transcribed as ?, x, k, s, t, and v. To avoid confusion with *א*, *כ*, *כ*, *ו*, *ת*, *ב*, they are transcribed as ָ, ְ, ִ, ְ, ִ, ְ, ְ, and w, despite current phonetic value.

Letters *כ*, *כ*, *ק*, *ש*, *ח*, are commonly transcribed as ch (kh), ph, k, sh, and tz (ts), but are transcribed instead x, f, q, š, š, thus:

melex (not *melech* or *melekh*)

מלך

ḥayyīm (not <i>chaim</i>)	חיים
'ēfōd (not <i>ephōd</i>)	אֲפֹוד
qāšīr (not <i>katzir</i>)	קָצֵיר
qabbālāh (not <i>kabbalah</i>)	קַבָּלָה
šemeš (not <i>shemesh</i>)	שֶׁמֶשׁ
ṣāddīq (not <i>tzaddik</i>)	צָדִיק

The Transliteration of Loanwords and Names

Names or loanwords which have entered Hebrew are subjected to Hebrew writing and spelling conventions, thus the following are transliterated:

artist	'artīṣṭ	אַרְטִּיסְטָן
biologic(al)	biyyōlōgī	בִּיּוֹלוֹגִי
philosophic(al)	filōsōfī	פִּילּוֹס֋ופִי
piano	pyānō	פִּיאָנוֹ
Washington	wōšīngtōn	וּוֹשִׁינְגְּטוֹן
capillary	qappīlārī	קַפִּילָרִי
ritual	rīṭū'āl	רִיטּוֹאָל

The Use of Diacritics and Orthographic Signs

Dāgēš (ׁדָּגֵשׁ)

Dāgēš has only two functions, the distinction of the plosives and spirants (*dāgēš qal*), and the latter the gemination or doubling of consonants (*dāgēš hāzāq*).

Dāgēš Qal (ׁדָּגֵשׁ קָלְ)

As already mentioned in earlier sections, *dāgēš qal* is used to differentiate between the plosives and the spirant consonants, particularly the *Begadkefat* letters.

In addition to the *begadkefat* letters, *dāgēš qal* also marks the plosives whether in the beginning of a word, or when the preceding consonant is not followed by a vowel., i.e.,

barwāz	ברַּוְזָ
karṭīs	קַרְטִּיסָן

mixtāv	מְקֻטָּב
hizdannēv	הַזְׁדַּנְבָּ

Dāgēš ḥazāq (דָּגֵשׁ חָזָק)

Dāgēš ḥazāq refers to the doubling of consonants, with the exception of the gutturals (e.g., א, ה, ח, ו, ר). Dāgēš ḥazāq may occur in the following:

a) After the definite article, e.g., ה ha-, the following consonants are geminated, thus:

haš-šāmayim	הַשָּׁמַיִם
ham-mayim	הַמַּיִם

b) When the preposition, מִ min becomes prefixed, e.g., מִ mi-, the following consonant is geminated, thus:

mis-sūs	מִסּוּס
mim-melex	מִמְלֵךְ

c) If the consonant is in between two vowels and is marked by dāgēš ḥazāq, it is geminated and is pronounced with prolongation, thus:

zakkūt	זָקּוּת
baddīl	בָּדִיל
'ayyēh	אַיִּה

NOTE: While in Classical Hebrew dāgēš ḥazāq marks gemination, in Modern Hebrew this has been lost and are realized as short, thus: zakkūt > zakut, baddīl > badil, 'ayyēh > ayeh. This is true for the prefixes and articles., i.e., haš-šāmayim > ha-šamaim, mim-melex > mi-melex.

Mappiq (מַפִּיק)

Mappiq sharing a similar form as dāgēš, is used in to denote an audible final ה hē' in feminine pronouns in the third person singular, thus;

lāh	לָהּ
šellāh	שְׁלָהּ
sifrāh	סְפִרָהּ

Šwā' (Schwa / שְׁוָא)

The subscript šwā', i.e., ָ, has two primary functions. The first function is to mark the absence of the vowels (šwā' nāh), i.e.,

šoftīm

שְׁפָטִים

mufsāq

מְפָسָק

The latter function is the audible schwa, i.e., ə (or e), this is known as šwā' nā'. This can occur in three ways:

a) When consonants form a cluster with letters ר, נ, מ, ל, ב, ה, ו, the schwa is realized as e., i.e.,

rəfā'īm

רְפָאִים

nəšāmāh

נְשָׁמָה

ləvānīm

לְבָנִים

yəlādīm

יְלָדִים

b) Before the guttural consonants, i.e., א, ה, ח, ו, the schwa is realized as e., i.e.,

tə'ūnāh

תְּאוּנָה

šə'ōnīm

שְׁעֻוּנִים

zəhīrūt

זְהִרּוֹת

c) If a consonant bearing šwā' is followed by a consonant bearing šwā', the šwā' is realized as e., i.e.,

nivdəqāh

נִבְדָּקָה

tisḡərū

תִּסְגּוֹרּוֹ

d) The šwā' in the inseparable prefixes, e.g., בָּ, כָּ, לָ, is realized as e before a word., i.e.,

lə-melex

לְמַלֵּךְ

bə-melex

בְּמַלֵּךְ

kə-melex

כְּמַלֵּךְ

The use of hyphen in the transliteration

When a word is preceded by the definite article, it is separated by a hyphen, i.e.,

hā-‘īr (not ha‘īr)	הָעִיר
haš-šemeš (not haŠemeš)	הַשְׁמֵשׁ
haq-qāšīr (not haQāšīr)	הַקָּשֵׁיר

Like the articles, when the inseparable prefixes are joined to a word, a hyphen is written., i.e.,

bə-śādəh (not beŚādəh)	בָּשָׂדָה
kə-melex (not keMelex)	קָמְלָךְ
lə-māqōm (not leMāqōm)	לִמְקוֹם

The conjunction *i wə* 'and' is also separated by a hyphen in the transliteration, i.e.,

wə-has-sūs (not vəhaSūs)	וְהָסֻס
way-yo'mer (not vayomer)	וַיֹּאמֶר

Maqqāf, e.g., - , used to connect two or more words to denote a single tone, is retained in the transliteration, i.e.,

קָלְ-אָדָם
'et-kāl-‘ēsēv
כָּלְ-אָדָם
אַתְ-כָּלְ-עַשֵּׁב

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